



**UNITED STATES ELECTION
ASSISTANCE COMMISSION**

**TESTIMONY
OF
COMMISSIONER GRACIA HILLMAN

BEFORE THE

TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS**

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***U.S. Election Assistance Commission
1225 New York Ave., NW – Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20005***



Good morning Chairman Berman, Vice Chair Bohac, and Members of the House Committee on Elections. I am pleased to be here on behalf of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to discuss poll worker recruitment, training and retention, EAC's work on those issues and effective examples of innovation taking place on the local level.

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 has provided about \$4 billion in funding to the States to help improve the administration of Federal elections, including the voters' access to the ballot. It is critically important that State legislatures understand the complexities of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), and we thank this committee for holding this hearing to examine the role of poll workers.

INTRODUCTION

The EAC is a bipartisan commission consisting of four members: [Rosemary Rodriguez](#), Chair; [Caroline Hunter](#), Vice Chair; [Donetta Davidson](#), and [Gracia Hillman](#). The commission is an independent Federal agency that guides and assists States in the effective administration of Federal elections. In doing so, the EAC has focused on fulfilling its obligations under HAVA and the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA). The EAC administers the distribution of HAVA Requirements Payments to States and provides State and local jurisdictions with tools that they can use to help increase the accuracy, reliability and security of their election systems and processes. Our country is in the middle of the important process of choosing our next President. The primary season has been marked by record turn out of voters who are not only engaged in the process but also excited about making their voices heard. During the primary season, a few challenges have arisen. We continue to see that if election jurisdictions underestimate the interest of the voters, one result is failure to have enough poll workers to assist voters.

Human error continues to be the source of most of the problems that emerge during the election process. Adequate compensation and vigorous training of poll workers are two remedies to help reduce the chances of errors. To assist with that task, the EAC has developed and distributed to State and local election officials throughout the nation several manuals including [Successful Practices for Poll Worker Recruitment, Training and Retention](#), [A Guidebook for Recruiting College Poll Workers](#), a [Compendium of State Poll Worker Requirements](#) and two *Quick Start Management Guides* (on [Poll Workers](#) and on [Polling Places & Vote Centers](#)). These materials were created with input from election officials and other experts who have found creative ways to address poll worker recruitment, training, and retention. These tools are proving to be useful resources to improve the poll worker experience.



ELECTION ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT

HAVA requires the EAC to assist States with the administration of Federal elections and establishes the Commission as a national clearinghouse of election information. To fulfill this mandate, the EAC makes research available on a range of issues including best practices in election administration. This information is presented to the election community and to the public through the EAC's website (www.eac.gov) as well as through formal reports.

Management Guidelines

The EAC assists States and local election jurisdictions by providing information about successfully managing all details surrounding the administration of elections. In 2005, the Commission began work on a comprehensive set of management guidelines, collaborating with a group of experienced State and local election officials to provide subject matter expertise and to help develop the guidelines. The project focuses on developing procedures related to management and procedures of the election administration process.

Eleven *Quick Start Guides* have been distributed to election officials throughout the nation. These guides covered topics such as introducing a new voting system; ballot preparation; voting system security; poll worker training; voting system certification; acceptance testing; absentee voting and vote by mail; contingency and disaster planning; media and public relations; managing change in an election office; and polling places and vote centers. These guides are available in the Election Official Center at www.eac.gov.

Poll Worker Recruitment

A large, trained pool of election workers is critical to the effective and efficient administration of elections. The average age of poll workers continues to rise and the number of returning workers falls each year. One of the EAC's top priorities is to help election officials recruit, train, and retain poll workers. This effort is part of two projects: one focused on traditional poll workers and one specifically aimed at recruiting college students as poll workers.

At its July 19, 2007 public meeting, the EAC adopted two manuals that can be used by election administrators to recruit, train and retain poll workers: [*Successful Practices for Poll Worker Recruitment, Training and Retention*](#) and [*A Guidebook for Recruiting College Poll Workers*](#). These guidebooks were created to directly assist local election officials with maintaining their poll worker pool, but also to provide educational tools for



State and local governments about the types of resources necessary to find and keep skilled poll workers. Similarly, it can serve as a reminder to the public at large of the need for volunteers to serve this very important function.

The commission also adopted a [*Compendium of State Poll Worker Requirements*](#) that contains the state election statutes and administrative regulations that govern poll worker requirements for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories.

Poll Worker Training & Retention

Every two years, election officials train more than 1.4 million citizens to carry out a task critical to our democracy. On Election Day, the citizen's right to cast a vote rests not in the hands of election officials but in the hands of poll workers.

Ultimately, poll workers ensure that eligible citizens are able to cast a vote and have that vote counted. Election officials must provide the training and tools poll workers need to carry out these important tasks. How well poll workers carry out their responsibilities reflects the quality of their training and the support they receive on Election Day.

The 2002 passage of HAVA, the deployment of new voting systems, and the introduction of new procedures and laws required the reinvention of most training programs. In addition, the heightened scrutiny of elections nationwide has made the job of poll worker more demanding, thus making the training more difficult at times.

Developing a high-quality training program takes time, work, and patience but it is well worth the investments because the rewards for this effort are poll workers who will be confident about their tasks and will not let voters down on Election Day.

Elections office staff must support and assist poll workers. An EAC study affirmed that the main reason poll workers return is that they enjoy the people they work with. Poll worker appreciation is critical to the retention process and can be achieved with excellent training, special recognition, incentives, and prompt and accurate payment. And perhaps the most important thing, which doesn't cost any money, is to say "thank you."

Accessibility Program for Voters

Often the challenge is not only finding enough poll workers, but finding poll workers who can effectively serve a diverse population. All voters are entitled to be empowered to enthusiastically participate in the franchise. The EAC supports and encourages efforts to recruit poll workers who span the age spectrum, who are bilingual, and who are disabled. A diverse poll worker workforce is best equipped to assist a diverse electorate.



HAVA mandates that the EAC study and promote methods of ensuring voter accessibility, registration, polling places, and voting equipment, including Native American and Alaska Native citizens and other voters with limited proficiency in the written English language. For these efforts to be effective on Election Day, poll workers must be able to help assure this accessibility.

The EAC's two guidebooks about recruiting, training, and retaining poll workers also include information about serving voters with alternative language needs. In addition, the EAC's [*Effective Designs in Elections*](#) report provides information about how to design polling place materials in several languages, including polling place signage and sample ballots. These materials help create a polling place environment that supports the poll workers' tasks to provide bilingual assistance.

HAVA also mandates that individuals with disabilities be able to vote privately and independently. To help meet this requirement, the EAC published an [*Accessibility Preparations Check-list*](#), which is a useful tool for poll workers.

Recruiting a group of poll workers that is a direct reflection of the electorate is sure to enhance the voting experience and create an environment that is focused on ensuring the accessibility of the voting process.

Innovation and Best Practices at the Local Level

There are many areas of the country that have already found innovative solutions to the poll worker shortage. Here are a few examples highlighted in our *Guide*:

- In Madison, WI, a city clerk focused on creating a link to an online application of their poll worker database. In an effort to entice young, savvy voters to serve as poll workers, the city developed an online poll worker application. The system references the appropriate home precinct of the poll worker. If a polling place needs additional workers, the applicant is noticed that they are needed at that polling place. If a poll worker team is full, applicants are asked if they are willing to travel to another precinct.
- Harris County, Texas, created an interesting and attractive promotional self mailer that was sent to prospective poll workers. The web site address was prominently displayed on the brochure – www.harrisvotes.com – and it was a modern and creative way to attract new people to the process.
- People in Washington, DC, heard weatherman Willard Scott on the radio, delivering a public service announcement recruiting poll workers.



- In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, their Recruitment and Outreach Assistant issues personalized pitch letters to civic minded organizations and churches. These letters ask the organizations to include information about serving as a poll workers in their newsletters and church bulletins.

The best ideas come from drawing on the collective experience and wisdom of seasoned election administrators and community leaders.

CONCLUSION

Conducting accurate, reliable, accessible, and secure elections is key to ensuring public confidence in our electoral system. The EAC exists to assist States by providing resources and information to help them best serve their voters. The voters of America, in turn, directly benefit from the service of poll workers and local election officials who are dedicated to the franchise.

Thank you again for examining the important role that poll workers play in the election process. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission as a part of these important discussions and I look forward to your questions.